

Low vision aids – factsheet

The General Optical Council (GOC) is the regulator for the optical professions in the UK. Our purpose is to protect the public by promoting high standards of education, conduct and performance amongst opticians. We currently register around 24,000 optometrists, dispensing opticians, student opticians and optical businesses.

Following enquiries about the laws around selling ‘off-the-shelf’ low vision aids (such as magnifying glasses, telescopes, binoculars and microscopes), we have put together the following factsheet.

For an offence to be committed under Section 27 of the Opticians Act, the item(s) being sold would need to be considered an ‘optical appliance’. The Opticians Act defines an optical appliance as “an appliance designed to correct, remedy or relieve a defect of sight”.

On this basis, the term can only be applied to items specifically made for use by those with defective vision and for the purpose of correcting, remedying or relieving the defect. It does not cover products designed to magnify the ordinary range of human vision, even if being used by someone with defective vision.

Therefore, unless a low vision aid is prescribed for a particular person to correct a specific defect of sight, it would not be considered an optical appliance. Neither its sale nor supply is restricted by the Opticians Act.

A criminal offence would only be committed if an item deemed to be an optical appliance, as defined above, had been sold by an individual who is not a registered optometrist, dispensing optician or medical practitioner and was not under the supervision of such a registrant. Such cases should be reported to the GOC for investigation.